

SIMON + SOREL + CLARA

10

HAY FEVER

~~SOREL. She used to be such fun before she married that gloomy little man.~~

~~SIMON. She was always a fierce poseuse. It's so silly of people to try and cultivate the artistic temperament.~~
Au fond she's just a normal, bouncing Englishwoman.

SOREL. You didn't shave this morning.

SIMON. I know I didn't, but I'm going to in a minute, when I've finished this. (*pointing to drawing*)

SOREL. I sometimes wish *we* were more normal and bouncing, Simon.

SIMON. Why? (*starts to draw again*)

SOREL. I should like to be a fresh, open-air girl with a passion for games.

SIMON. Thank God you're not.

SOREL. It would be so soothing.

SIMON. Not in this house.

SOREL. Where's mother?

SIMON. In the garden, practising.

SOREL. Practising?

SIMON. (*stops drawing and looks at SOREL*) She's learning the names of the flowers by heart.

SOREL. What's she up to?

SIMON. I don't know. (*looks down at drawing*) Damn! That's crooked.

SOREL. I *always* distrust her when she becomes the Squire's lady.

SIMON. So do I. (*starts drawing again*)

SOREL. She's been at it hard all day – she tapped the barometer this morning.

SIMON. She's probably got a plan about impressing somebody.

SOREL. (*taking a cigarette from table behind sofa*) I wonder who.

SIMON. Some dreary, infatuated young man will appear soon, I expect.

SOREL. Not today? (*lights cigarette*) You don't think she's asked anyone down today, do you?

SIMON. (*stops drawing and looks up*) I don't know. Has father noticed anything?

SOREL. No; he's too immersed in work.

SIMON. Perhaps Clara will know.

SOREL. Yell for her.

SIMON. (*rises and goes up center, calling off door below stairs*) Clara! Clara! ...

SOREL. (*moves to right end of sofa*) Oh, Simon, I *do* hope she hasn't asked anyone down today.

SIMON. (*coming down to right end of sofa*) Why? Have you?

SOREL. Yes.

SIMON. (*crossly*) Why on earth didn't you tell me?

SOREL. I didn't think you'd care one way or another.

SIMON. Who is it?

SOREL. Richard Greatham.

SIMON. (*goes back to drawing*) How exciting! I've never heard of him.

SOREL. I shouldn't flaunt your ignorance if I were you – it makes you look silly.

(*SIMON, rising and picking up one sheet of cartridge paper, and pencil:*)

SIMON. Well, that's done.

(*He rolls up the cartridge paper.*)

SOREL. Everybody's heard of Richard Greatham.

SIMON. (*amiably*) How lovely for them! (*going to piano*)

SOREL. He's a frightfully well-known diplomatist – I met him at the Mainwarings' dance.

SIMON. He'll need all his diplomacy here. (*puts pencil on piano*)

SOREL. I warned him not to expect good manners, but I hope you'll be as pleasant to him as you can.

SIMON. (*gently – moves to center*) I've never met any diplomatists, Sorel, but as a class I'm extremely prejudiced against them. They're so suave and polished and debonair.

SOREL. You could be a little more polished without losing caste.

SIMON. (*moves to SOREL*) Will he have the papers with him?

SOBEL. What papers?

SIMON. (*vaguely*) Oh, any papers. (*goes up center and puts paper on chair*)

SOREL. I wish you'd confine your biting irony to your caricatures, Simon.

SIMON. (*coming down to SOREL*) And I wish you'd confine your girlish infatuations to London, and not force them on your defenceless family.

SOREL. I shall keep him out of your way as much as possible.

SIMON. Do, darling. (*goes to piano and lights cigarette*)

(*Enter CLARA from door below stairs. She is a hot, round, untidy little woman. She stands left by door.*)

(*sits on form by piano*) Clara, has mother asked anyone down this weekend?

CLARA. I don't know, dear. There isn't much food in the house, and Amy's got toothache.

SOREL. I've got some oil of cloves somewhere.

CLARA. She tried that, but it only burnt her tongue. The poor girl's been writhing about in the scullery like one o'clock.

SOREL. You haven't forgotten to put those flowers in the Japanese room?

SIMON. The Japanese room is essentially feminine, and entirely unsuited to the Pet of the Foreign Office.

SOREL. Shut up, Simon!

CLARA. The room looks lovely, dear – you needn't worry. Just like your mother's dressing-room on a first night.

SIMON. How restful!

CLARA. (*moves to SOREL*) Have you told her about your boyfriend?

SOREL. (*pained*) Not boyfriend, Clara.

(CLARA picks up drawing that SIMON has left on floor center.)

CLARA. Oh, well, whatever he is. (*puts drawing on chair up center*)

SIMON. I think Sorel's beginning to be ashamed of us all, Clara – I don't altogether blame her; we are very slapdash.

CLARA. (*coming down center – speaking to SIMON*) Are you going to leave that picture in the guests' bathroom, dear? I don't know if it's quite the thing – lots of pink, naked women rolling about in a field.

SIMON. (*severely*) Nudity can be very beautiful, Clara.

CLARA. Oh, can it! Perhaps being a dresser for so long 'as spoilt me eye for it.

(CLARA goes out door below stairs.)

SIMON. Clara's looking tired. We ought to have more servants and not depend on her so much.

SOREL. You know we can never keep them. You're right about us being slapdash, Simon. I wish we weren't.

SIMON. Does it matter?

SOREL. It must, I think – to other people.

SIMON. It's not our fault – it's the way we've been brought up.

SOREL. Well, if we're clever enough to realize that, we ought to be clever enough to change ourselves.

SIMON. I'm not sure that I want to.

SOREL. We're so awfully bad-mannered.

SIMON. Not to people we like.

SOREL. The people we like put up with it because they like us.